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SUBJECT: LESOTHO GOVERNMENT CLAIMS ASSASSINATION PLOT

REF: 07 MASERU 630 AND PREVIOUS

11. (SBU) Summary: The Lesotho Government's senior spokesperson stated publicly in January that the GOL had uncovered a plot by opposition political parties to assassinate government ministers and business figures, an issue he revisited with the Ambassador during a January 30 courtesy call. In the absence of arrests or other visible law enforcement action in the interim, local observers have questioned the credibility of the alleged plot. Nonetheless, unresolved attacks in 2007 on GOL ministers during the country's post-election impasse clearly continue to trouble senior officials who remain suspicious about the political opposition's motives. The Minister described one immediate political benefit of going public with the alleged plot when he observed that the country's leading taxi association, closely aligned with the political opposition, had cancelled a late January/early February strike and publicly disassociated itself with the alleged plot. End Summary.

A Plot Exposed?

12. (U) In early January, Minister of Communications, Science, and Technology Mothojoa Metsing appeared on both state-owned television and radio stating that the GOL had uncovered a plot by opposition political parties to assassinate government ministers and business figures. The Minister alleged that the plot was to be undertaken during a work stoppage protest planned for February 2008. Metsing claimed to possess a list of targeted government ministers and businesspersons, but said that he would not reveal their identities. Metsing offered, however, that business owners who had not supported an opposition-led strike in December 2008 were specifically targeted. Lesotho Workers' Party (LWP) leader Macaefa Billy, a key opposition figure, expressed publicly his shock at the allegations and denied any plotting on behalf of Lesotho's opposition parties.

The Ambassador's Courtesy Call

13. (SBU) On January 30, Ambassador Nolan, accompanied by DCM and Poloff, paid a courtesy call on Minister Metsing to discuss general bilateral issues. During the meeting, Metsing raised the assassination plot, reiterating that unidentified elements among Lesotho's political opposition sought to use violence to undermine the GOL, as they had allegedly done during attacks by unidentified assailants on him and other ministers in mid-2007. Metsing suggested that his statement had delivered immediate political benefit, observing that the country's leading taxi association, closely aligned with the political opposition, had cancelled a late January/early February strike and publicly disassociated itself with the alleged plot.

More Questions

¶4. (SBU) Comment: In the absence of arrests or other visible law enforcement action, local observers have questioned the credibility of the alleged plot. Nonetheless, unresolved attacks in 2007 on ministerial residences during the country's post-election impasse clearly continue to trouble senior officials. According to a visiting British diplomat from Pretoria, Lesotho's MFA formally complained to the British Embassy in Pretoria about her February meetings in Maseru with political opposition leaders, an unusual posture for the GOL but one that reflects deep suspicion about opposition motives. The Minister described one immediate political benefit of going public with the alleged plot when he observed that the country's leading taxi association, closely aligned with the political opposition, had cancelled a late January/early February strike and publicly disassociated itself with the alleged plot. End Comment.

NOLAN